

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /070 W
-----081811Z 043075 /12

P R 060949Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3556
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 07464

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: HMG ASSESSMENT OF STRIKE

REF: LONDON 6941

SUMMARY: HMG BELIEVES THAT THE MILITANT LOYALIST
"GENERAL STRIKE" IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS RUNNING OUT OF
STEAM, BUT DOES NOT YET DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT
IT WILL GAIN IMPETUS. SECURITY FORCES ARE MORE THAN
MEETING THE CHALLENGE IN AN EFFECTIVE, NON-PROVOCATIVE
WAY. ACTIONS OF POWER WORKERS, WHO REMAIN ON THE JOB'
COULD STILL PROVE CRITICAL, HOWEVER. WHETHER THE
STRIKE FAILS OR SUCCEEDS' HMG BELIEVES THE POLITICAL
SITUATION IN NI WILL HAVE BEEN ALTERED. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF CALLED ON NI OFFICE UNDER SECRETARY JOHN
BOURN THE AFTERNOON OF MAY 5 FOR A BRIEFING ON HMG'S
PERCEPTIONS OF GENERAL STRIKE. ACCORDING TO BOURN, HMG
IS SATISFIED WITH CURRENT STATE OF PLAY WHICH INDICATES
THAT SUPPORT FOR STRIKE IS ABATING. IT WOULD, OF
COURSE, HAVE PREFERRED TO SEE REV. PAISLEY AND OTHER
STRIKE LEADERS PULL BACK LAST MONDAY. HMG'S INFORMATION
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IS THAT MORE SHOPS AND FACTORIES ARE OPEN TODAY, THE
THIRD DAY OF THE STRIKE, THAN ON THE FIRST TWO DAYS, AND
MORE PEOPLE ARE AT WORK. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSPOR-
TATION ARE EDGING BACK TOWARD NORMAL LEVELS AND ROYAL
ULSTER CONSTABULARY (RUC) IS REMOVING ROAD BLOCKS AS
FAST AS THEY ARE PUT UP AND NO LONGER MEETING WITH
RESISTANCE (THERE WERE SCATTERED INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

YESTERDAY AS RUC LIFTED ROAD BLOCKS). HMG ALSO BELIEVES PRESS REPORTS THAT THE PARAMILITARY ULSTER DEFENSE ASSOCIATION (UDA) HAS ORDERED ITS MINIONS TO ADOPT A LOW PROFILE ARE CORRECT.

2. BOURN IS ESPECIALLY PLEASED WITH THE WAY THE RUC IS HANDLING THE SITUATION. THEIR SUCCESS HAS MEANT THAT THE ARMY COULD REMAIN IN THE BACKGROUND, ALBEIT THE VISIBLE BACKGROUND. ONLY 28 ARRESTS HAD BEEN MADE THROUGH THE MORNING OF MAY 5, AS THE RUC IS UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO AVOID PROVOCATIVE ACTS. HE SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT RUC MIGHT SUBSEQUENTLY ARREST AND CHARGE THOSE WHO HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED AS BEING INVOLVED IN VIOLENT INCIDENTS OR IN COERCING OTHERS. THUS FAR, HE SAID, THE PROVISIONAL IRA HAS SHOWN NO SIGNS OF WISHING TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION.

3. HMG STILL BELIEVES THE ACTIONS OF THE ELECTRICAL POWER WORKERS COULD BE PIVOTAL. DESPITE REPORTS THAT THEY VOTED TO SUPPORT THE STRIKE, POWER PLANTS ARE OPERATING AT FULL CAPACITY AND THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS OF A SHUTDOWN. DRIVERS OF PETROL DELIVERY TRUCKS VOTED TO DELIVER ONLY TO THOSE STATIONS APPROVED BY THE STRIKE LEADERS, BUT IN FACT VERY FEW STATIONS HAVE BEEN REFUSED DELIVERY AND THERE SEEMS TO BE PLENTY OF PETROL AVAILABLE. THE DOCKS AT LARNE, HOWEVER, REMAIN CLOSED AND UNLIKELY TO OPEN BEFORE THE WEEKEND.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 07464

4. BOURN WAS NOT WILLING TO PREDICT HOW THE STRIKE WILL ULTIMATELY TURN OUT, NOTING THAT IT COULD PICK UP STEAM OVER THE WEEKEND OR RUN DOWN FURTHER. IN EITHER EVENT, HE FELT THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN NI WOULD BE FUNDAMENTALLY ALTERED. IF THE STRIKE SHOULD SUCCEED, IT IS CLEAR THAT HMG WOULD BE FORCED TO ALTER ITS CURRENT NI POLICY; IF IT FAILS, HMG WILL WANT TO EXPLOIT THE MILITANTS' EXPOSED WEAKNESSES AND REWARD THOSE UNIONISTS AND OTHER POLITICIANS WHO SUPPORTED HMG IN OPPOSING THE STRIKE. BUT, HE SAID, HMG HAD NOT YET DECIDED WHAT MOVES IT MIGHT MAKE IN EITHER EVENTUALITY.

5. COMMENT: HMG'S ASSESSMENT, AS DESCRIBED BY BOURN, IS GENERALLY CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF THE CONGEN, BELFAST. BOTH, INCIDENTALLY, ARE MORE CAUTIOUS THAN THE PRESS WHICH HAS REPORTED THAT THE STRIKE "IS CRUMBLING". WE INFERRED FROM BOURN'S REMARKS THAT HMG STILL BELIEVES THE STRIKE WILL FALL FROM ITS OWN WEIGHT, BUT CONSIDERS THE SITUATION TOO FLUID TO MAKE ANY PREDICTIONS. HIS SUGGESTION THAT THE STRIKE IS LIKELY TO BE A WATERSHED
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EVENT IN NI POLITICAL TERMS SEEMS TO US REASONABLE. IF THE STRIKE SHOULD FAIL, WE ANTICIPATE HMG WOULD TAKE INITIATIVES TOWARD SOME KIND OF "ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION" ALONG THE LINES SUGGESTED EARLIER BY UUUC LEADER MOLYNEAUX, BUT WE ARE AT A LOSS TO PREDICT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF PAISLEY AND HIS COHORTS SHOULD SUCCEED.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR RELATIONS, GENERAL STRIKES, POLITICAL SITUATION
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LONDON07464
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Line Count: 160
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Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 LONDON 6941
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2617662
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NORTHERN IRELAND: HMG ASSESSMENT OF STRIKE
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4dbc8a99-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009